

COAST VEDDAS

333

There are a few Verdas at Panichchenkeni, while near Vakara³⁶¹ still further to the north there is a Verda settlement of considerable size. Some eight miles beyond this are two Verda settlements Parchenai and Nargantonai situated close together. We heard of other smaller settlements of Coast Veddas in the neighbourhood of Batticaloa, but these were not visited as time was short and it appeared that those Verdas we did not see differed in no respect from those we met. We were told that formerly there were Coast Veddas south of Batticaloa and we later discovered that there were, and still are, certain shrines or temples within a few miles of the coast (e.g. at Mandur), which were generally recognised as Vedda shrines at which Veddas especially worshipped. This matter has been alluded to in Chapter VIII, and here it is only necessary to point out that the religion of the Coast Veddas is strongly tinged with Tamil customs and beliefs; indeed, many Verdas had Hindu sect marks upon their foreheads. [778]

Some, but not all, of the Coast Veddas know the names of the *waruge* to which they belong, and a few also know the names of some of the more important *waruge* of the Veddas inland. Uru *waruge* appears to be the *waruge* to which most of the Coast Veddas who remembered their ancestral *waruge* belonged, but a few men stated that they belonged to Ogamam, Kavatham, Umata or Umatam, Aembaleneduwe and Aembale *waruge*; the last named and the one before it probably being the same as the Aembela *waruge* found inland. Some of the Coast Vedd⁶¹⁴as whom we questioned said they had heard of, and still knew of certain of the old Vedda *waruge*, and such men were generally able to mention Morane *waruge* while fewer also knew of Unapane *waruge*.

The Coast Vedd²²⁶as have become expert fishermen and make and use various forms of nets including a cast net. They also²²⁷ spear and shoot fish, using a bifid iron spear-head which they⁴¹¹ have adopted from the Tamils. For shooting fish they use the usual Vedda bow, but the arrow has become a harpoon with a shaft as long as the bow into which the iron with its running line fits loosely. One of the nets used by the Coast Vedd²²⁷as is seen drying behind the house in the background of Plate LXIX,

334

THE VEDDAS

● 227

411

186

611
614
582

262

[235]

[113]

Fig. 13. Verda bow and
harpoon $\times \frac{1}{4}$.
Iron harpoon head $\times \frac{1}{2}$.

fig. 2, while Mr Storey's book contains an excellent photograph of these people spearing fish¹.

The length of the Verda bow and harpoon shaft shown in fig. 13 are 208 cm. and 220 cm. respectively. The bow is an extremely powerful weapon, its diameter at its thickest part being about 3.3 cm.

In spite of the perfectly obvious fact that the majority of the Veddas are more Tamil than Vedda the old Vedda pride of blood survives and some of the older Veddas denied that they intermarried with Tamils.

Children of marriages in which the *waruge* of the contracting parties were known took their father's *waruge*, but it seemed to be a matter of no account whether or no individuals of the same *waruge* intermarried.

Everyone avoids eating fowl and all our informants both male and female denied that they ever ate it, though often suggesting that others might do so. On the other hand, one informant who bred fowls for sale summed the matter up with an emphatic "Veddass don't eat fowls." No reason was given for this abstinence but all agreed that their ancestors had not eaten fowl, though the majority of our informants admitted that they would breed fowls for sale and kill and prepare fowls for others to eat. Beef was said to be generally avoided though it was not

¹ *Hunting and Shooting in Ceylon*, London, 1907, p. 330.